

LACK OF POLITICAL SENSITIVITY TO COST OF LIVING WORRIES JCTR

The current high level of cost of living is exceedingly difficult to cope with and has led to greater suffering for the majority of the Zambian people, observes the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

According to the Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Research Project, Muweme Muweme, the Food Basket for the month of September stands at K357,300, an increase of K8,800 from the previous month's figure of K348,500. "Though this increase may not be seen as a huge leap in the cost compared to the one for the last month, it is in a way a significant one. This is so because it is taking place at an already much higher figure beyond the reach of many poor households," says Muweme.

What is also worrying in this environment of deteriorating living conditions is the lack of political sensitivity and zeal to act promptly to avert crisis situations. The shortfall in the maize stock national requirement is an issue that should have been addressed long ago without necessarily leading to the current levels in the price of mealie meal. For example, when did the nation know that it was going to experience a short fall in maize national requirements? And when were remedial measures supposed to be put in place? Why was the prompt action delayed?

Worse still is the fact that as we approach the elections, very little in terms of programmes to address the problem of rising cost of living is being talked about by various political parties.

Before the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, there were already indications that the global economy was beginning to slow down. This was shown by reports of job losses in industrial economies such as Japan and Germany.

However, Muweme further says, "What is more worrying now is the fact that the process of economic slow down is going to be given much impetus following what happened in the United States. This ultimately will impact negatively on the already high cost of living in Zambia, especially with possible rising price of fuel and declining price of copper."

Two issues emerge from what is happening pertaining to the availability of maize and to the slow down in the global economy. The *first* is the need to properly forecast and thereby deal with the problem before it gets worse. The *second* is to put in place measures relating to global economic situations that would help mitigate impact of what is happening at that level on the national economy.

Currently, without any precautions in place, the situation both locally and internationally gives very little hope in terms of uplifting Zambia's living conditions. According to Muweme, "We Zambian citizens need to hear our competing politicians talk more about these issues so that we can vote for wise and effective leaders."

[For more information, contact Muweme Muweme, Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. BOX 37774, Lusaka, Zambia; tel: 260-1-290410; e-mail: socialjctr@zamnet.zm; web: www.jctr.org.zm]